CHAPTER VI

Marriage

Reviewing the marriage ceremonies observed by the Georgian 581
Highlanders, we notice three distinct main parts in the procedure: the match-making, the betrothal, and the wedding.

The marriage is not a private but a communal affair: it represents a contract. The contracting parties are not separate individuals but social groups of families, or even whole communities. All relatives of the young pair take an active interest in the business. The family of the bride is interested not only in receiving the bride-price from the bridegroom, but also in the personality of the groom and the possible advantages of the union for the entire group. On the other side, the relatives of the bridegroom are busy supplying him with the necessary resources in order to meet the expenses of the celebration attendant upon all marriage ceremonies, so that in this case also we have the clearly marked group solidarity manifested in the assistance given the individual by the group as a whole. This last-mentioned trait of communal support of the bridegroom by his kinsmen is characteristic of all groups of Georgian Highlanders.

Although a certain amount of the bride-price must be paid by 583
the man in acquiring his wife in the communities of the Georgian Highlanders, nevertheless we cannot say that they follow the practice of marriage by purchase as is done by other mountaineers of the Caucasus. The price paid by the Georgian for his bride is a minimum amount and is far outweighed by the special gifts presented to the bride by her relatives and friends, and by the dowry of the bride which represents her personal capital (called *sathavno*) and which she brings with her to the home of her future husband.

Contrary to the custom of the Georgians, the bride-price among 583
the other mountaineers of the Caucasus has a strictly established 171
value, paid in money or its equivalent in nature, and representing marriage by purchase. For the sake of comparison, let us consider

6: Grigolia E-4, 5 (no date) 1939 RI1 Georgia RI1

Princely Svanetia, where the rulers of the country required that an indemnity be paid in addition, for the benefit of the ruling house. Theft connected with breaking into a house was regarded as a very serious offense, and a payment consisting of twelve *azish* was requested. The theft of the iron chain of the hearth (called *sakadeli* in the Georgian) or the small iron three-legged table on which bread was baked was regarded as an especially severe crime.

A discrimination in the importance of the crime was made according to the time and place where it was committed. A crime committed at night was worse than one committed during the day, and a crime perpetrated out of doors was of much less importance than one in a home.

Theft committed outside the group was regarded as neither a crime nor a delict, but on the contrary was viewed as an accomplishment of courage and bravery, elevating the culprit in social prestige and creating even gradations in distinction, according to the danger involved and the success of the accomplishment, the procedure resembling in some ways the *coups* of the American Indians.

Among the Georgians of Megrelia, in time past, a young man had difficulty in getting a wife if he had not stolen at least one horse.[36] There were various and numerous tales of gallant and cunning thieves who outwitted their pursuers and escaped safely with their spoil, and who had the admiration of the people.

The same attitude prevailed also among the other peoples of the Caucasus. Among the Circassians, for example, a young man could not be successful with the fair sex if he had not committed a theft. Taitbout de Marigny[37] gives the following information concerning this matter: "Le plus grand reproche qu'une jeune fille puisse faire a un graçon, c'est de l'ai dire qu'il n'a pas encore pu derober une vache. Mais les proprietés sont respectées parmi les personnes que la paranté, l'amitié, l'hospitalité, ou d'autres liens unissent ensemble."

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[36] Lamberti: 76-8.
[37] Taitbout de Marigny: 291.